

#CSIMonth is every month in travel and tourism

By  Natalia Rosa

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While July may be the month where we remember to give back to others, when it comes to the travel and tourism industry, every day is an opportunity to contribute to the sustainability of the planet's people, places, wildlife and natural resources.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

As I revel in the 'feel good, give good' Mandela Day vibes, a cutting of Spekboom sits on my desk waiting to be planted. A gift from SATSA, the Voice of Inbound Tourism, at its recent conference, this little cutting of Spekboom is one of several thousand that the association will be planting in conjunction with South African Tourism and members of the inbound tourism sector to take responsibility for and substantially reduce the carbon emissions that result from tourists travelling long-haul to visit South African shores.



Satsa, SA Tourism's new initiative to highlight importance of carbon offsetting

15 Jul 2019



Turns out this miracle plant, which grows in my backyard, indeed the backyards of many South Africans, has incredible carbon-offsetting properties and can sequester more than 4 tons of CO² emissions per year per hectare planted, making it more effective than the Amazon rainforest at removing CO² from the atmosphere.

Instead of taking the impact of emissions on our environment and the resulting #flightshaming movement on the chin, South Africa (through SATSA and SA Tourism's initiative) is stepping into the gap and actively focussing on sustainability as a destination, not just in the month of July, but year-round.

Communities and the tourism industry

While we're getting all 'David Attenborough' about our planet, we're also starting to recognise the need to bring communities into the tourism value chain in scale and with heart. South Africa's Tourism Conservation Fund was created to achieve this inclusive change and to protect and promote conservation areas by investing in adjacent communities and creating sustainable businesses. It is doing some great work, but needs to be better funded by the tourism industry.

One such initiative is the 'Yes for Youth' initiative in which the Tourism Conservation Fund is working with tourism organisations to place unemployed youths into the wildlife economy. Tourism is one of the most employable sectors for youths, with a low skills barrier to entry and we know that some work experience is critical if we are to ensure the long-term employment of youths in the formal sector.

There's recognition within the tourism industry that it is our duty to look after our communities. It is unconscionable to sell South Africa as the beautiful destination that it is if each individual within the tourism sector does not do what he or she can to ensure tourism benefits the members of communities and helps to change their lives.

From tourism to travel, I watched as Flight Centre travel agents took on Africa's highest peak in March to raise funds for the building and equipping of a library at Qhobosheane Primary School in Johannesburg. They ditched their smart uniforms for hiking boots and trekked up a mountain because they believe that education is the only truly sustainable way of improving the socio-economic problems in South Africa.

To this end over the past year, Flight Centre Travel Group's Brighter Futures (previously the Flight Centre Foundation) has also donated thousands of solar lights to students who don't have access to reliable lighting. Working in partnership with SolarBuddy and Clean C, Brighter Futures gifted the lights to learners from impoverished communities who struggle to study after it gets dark. Research shows that having a SolarBuddy light gives learners an extra 38% of time to study. This is not a once-off initiative for CSI month, it's ongoing.



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Further afield, The Treadright Foundation brings together The Travel Corporation's family of brands to "have a positive impact on the people and communities we visit, to protect wildlife and marine life, and to care for the planet."

TreadRight has supported over 50 sustainable tourism projects worldwide, through donations and grants. In many cases, travellers with the brands of The Travel Corporation participate directly in these projects when they travel, whether that's visiting a cooperative of weavers in Peru who are working to sustain their craft traditions or helping to eliminate single-use plastics across its global operations and companies by 2022.

“ Sustainability is the future of our industry. ”

All these initiatives go beyond a CSI month – perhaps in recognition that tourism and travel can and must have a positive impact on tourism destinations and the communities and animals that find sanctuary there; perhaps acknowledging that it is the tourism industry's duty to preserve our world for its future and for future generations.

I believe, as my colleagues in travel and tourism do, that sustainability is the future of our industry. It makes me proud to be

part of an industry so proactively and genuinely trying to make a difference to the world within which it operates.

ABOUT NATALIA ROSA

Natalia Rosa is the MD of Big Ambitions, a specialist travel and tourism communications and marketing organisation which helps tourism and travel organisations connect with their members and customers.

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